

Thomas Jefferson to Abraham B. Venable, January 23, 1809 , from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO ABRAHAM VENABLE J. MSS.

Washington, January 23, 09.

Dear Sir, —In a letter to my friend & relation, Mr. Jefferson, I explained to him the unexpected difficulties into which I was likely to fall on my winding up my affairs here, with a request to endeavor to procure me the aid of the bank at Richmond. You have been so kind as to interpose and to procure for me the sum needed on private loan, which is infinitely more eligible for myself. It is the more so inasmuch as your friendly undertaking to be my indorser, contrary to a necessary rule you had established will, by remaining unknown, not expose you to other solicitations of the like kind. I return you, my dear sir, my sincere thanks for this friendly relief, and shall ever retain a lively sense of it; & the greater as I should never have thought myself entitled to ask such a favor of you. In addition to the resources for repaiment mentioned in the letter to Mr. Jefferson, I have directed my agents in Bedford & Albermarle to offer in each place a tract of land for sale, worth each from 4 to 5 thousand D. A crop of tobo. which will be in his hands the next month, wilt make a first impression on the amount, and with another a twelve month hence will discharge 5,000 D. of the sum, for the balance I must depend on the sale of some of those lands, of which one tract alone is certain, an offer having been made to me for that. Lands are of difficult sale. For this reason I have asked the indulgence of a twelve month certain. The note sent me is for 6 months, but I presume will be renewable; otherwise I should be forced at its

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expiration to have recourse to the bank. Repeating again my extreme obligation to you, I salute you with great esteem & respect.¹

¹ On the subject of his financial straits Jefferson further wrote to Madison:

“ Monticello, May 22, 09.

“ Dear Sir,—It is my duty to write to you on the subject of the note you were so kind as to endorse for me at the Bank of the U. S., and I do it willingly, altho' painfully. Notwithstanding a fixed determination to take care that at the termination of my duties at Washington my pecuniary matters should at least be square, and my confidence that they would be so, I found, by an estimate made in December last, that there would be a deficit in them of several thousand dollars. I took immediate measures for transferring that debt to Virginia, and did it the more easily as I was enabled to pledge certain resources which I had in possession, or not very distant. However after this liquidation effected, other demands, which had not come under my view, came upon me, one after another, and required to answer them the amount of the note you indorsed for me. The forms of the bank requiring two indorsers, for an absentee, I asked of Mr. Barnes to be the second, which he very readily assented to, the cashier previously assuring me that it would have no effect on their transactions with Mr. Barnes on his private account, & so I assured him. But by a letter I have received from the old gentleman, I find that he is made uneasy by some circumstance in the execution of the note, which makes him liable in the first instance, were the bank, contrary to expectation, to make a sudden demand of the money. It would add much to my affliction to give him uneasy nights at his age, which obliges me to ask you to satisfy him by interposing yourself between him & the first liability to the bank, which I believe is done by your subscribing the words 'credit the drawer' instead of his doing it. He however can best say how this may be done. I might, without much delay have relieved you from this unpleasant responsibility had I not engaged my earliest resources on my first estimate, which I then thought would discharge all demands. It is this circumstance which renders me unable to fix any time with confidence. I limit

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my expenses here to my income here, leaving that of my Bedford estate free, which is about 2500 D. clear one year with another. But as this would take an improper course of time, I am endeavoring to sell several detached parcels of land, unconnected with my possessions either here or in Bedford, & which I can spare without diminution of revenue or other inconvenience. They amount to between two & three thousand acres & at the market prices would bring the double of these deficits. I trust that the bank will find no interest in calling for a reimbursement before I shall have been able to avail myself of all my resources.

“I had seen with much pleasure that the dispute with Pennsylvania was likely to go off so smoothly; but am much mortified to see the spirit manifested by the prisoners themselves as well as by those who participated in the parade of their liberation. One circumstance in it struck my attention disagreeably, but it admitted a different explanation. I trust that no section of republicans will countenance the suggestions of the Federalists that there has ever been any difference at all in our political principles, or any sensible one in our views of the public interest.

“After a most distressing drought of 5 or 6 weeks we had on the 18th instant a very fine rain, followed by calm & tolerably warm weather, and yesterday & last night a plentiful rain has fallen again. The coldness & backwardness of the spring however had not advanced plants sufficiently to enable the planters to avail themselves of them as seasons. I tender always to Mrs. Madison my affectionate respects & to yourself the assurances of my constant & cordial attachment.

To Charles Clay

“ Monticello, Dec. 15, 09.

“ Dear Sir,—This will be handed you by my son-in-law Mr. Randolph, with the integrity and honor of whose character you are already acquainted. An urgent occasion to raise a considerable sum of money in the course of a year, and a part of it (2,000 D.) within

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the month of January, has induced me to propose to him the curtailing the outskirts of my poplar forest lands, as the most probable means of effecting it. I did not know of this urgency when I had the pleasure of seeing you in Bedford or I would have set on foot this expedient with the benefit of more time if the first sum could not have been otherwise procured. Your knowledge of the value of the land, of the price it should command, as prices go with you, & of the characters who may be disposed to purchase & likely to fulfill their engagements, induces me to ask your friendly information, counsel & aid to him towards effecting his object, which will be cordially acknowledged by me as a great obligation, feeling as anxiously interested in his case as if it were my own. I pray you to be assured of my constant esteem & respect."